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ABSTRACT

A new method of continuous stroke manuscript print called D'Nealian Manuscript is challenging the traditional circle-stick method of teaching children how to write. The circle-stick uses component or splinter parts to form whole letters. Children are forced to form all writing with verticle lines and to learn a manuscript print that goes nowhere. Moreover, large pencils are usually recommended and the letters are presented in unnecessarily large print. The D'Nealian method, on the other hand, presents letter forms similar to standard print, has carryover skills to cursive writing, and eliminates many of the errors of circle-stick writing. All letters are made with a continuous stroke except to dot the "i" and "j" and cross the "f" and "t." Children also begin to write on near standard-sized paper. They use a pencil size that feels comfortable to their grip and may write letters with a back, vertical, or typical right-hand slant. Letters are presented in groups of similar construction, and as a letter is introduced it is immediately used in a word. Basic vocabulary is thus enhanced, along with left-to-right eye movement and directionality. Because children can write words more easily and sooner with D'Nealian, it is an important aid to reading development. (HOD)

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D'Nealian Manuscript - an aid to reading development

Donald N. Thurber

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D'Nealian Manuscript - an aid to reading development

One of the hardest tasks in education is to bring about change in philosophy, teaching methods, or subject-skill matter.

In the Language Arts area of handwriting, change is happening which challenges the traditional circle-stick methods of teaching children how to write.

This new method is a continuous stroke manuscript print. It was developed by me and is called D'Nealian Manuscript. I have twelve years teaching experience in kindergarten and first grade. Presently I'm an elementary principal in the Gibraltar School District, Rockwood, Michigan.

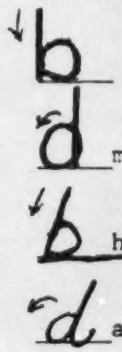
About 1922 circle-stick writing appeared on the American educational scene. It has been with us since then as the major method in teaching children to write. However, this type of writing contains many built in errors. These errors have resulted in school's producing a nation of rather poor writers. Also circle-stick writing may hinder beginning reading development.

In critically going over circle-stick methods I found several illogical aspects that illustrate change was needed. For example circle-stick uses component or slinter parts to form a whole letter. This results in jerky movements which hinders rhythm in the motor process of writing. This rhythm is an essential ingredient for effortless flow when stroking a letter. (McClelland 1975; Serior 1970)

A second error found is that children are forced to form all writing with vertical lines. (McKenna 1970; Towle 1978) However, when it is time to switch to cursive writing a slant is insisted on. It is a simple matter to teach slant from the start thus avoiding a learning then unlearning

situation.

The third error is that children are forced to learn a manuscript print that goes nowhere. Just about the time they are writing it neatly they do a complete switch to new cursive writing. (Lehman 1980) Coupled with this is a built-in reversal problem. Most children struggle with the b-d reversal because of the similarity between the two letters.



make a line, draw a cricle next to it

make a circle, make a line next to it

high start down, around up and a tummy

around down up high, down and a monkey tail

With D'Nealian there isn't a problem because letters "b" and "d" have strong visual differences with exact audio letter descriptive clues to help the learner differentiate between the two. Specific audio directions are involved with each letter in order to use auditory processing along with visual discrimination. No longer will children have to wonder which is which and what goes where.

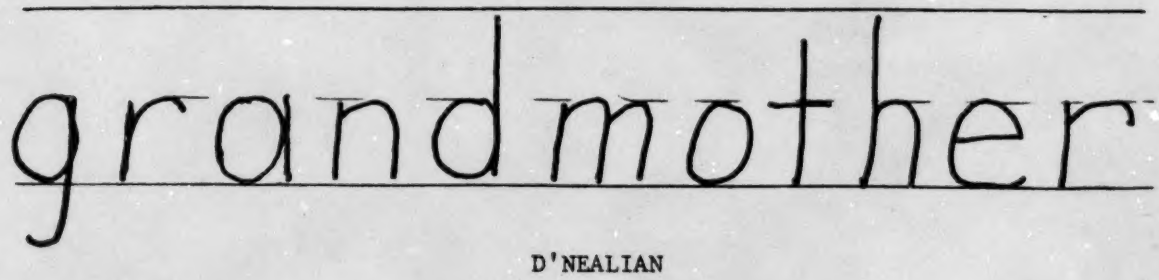
A fourth error found is the large pencils usually recommended for beginning writers. For years it has been common practice to offer beginners in handwriting comparatively large writing tools. Unfortunately this practice is based more on tradition than on scientific research or experimentation. (Herrick 1961; Coles and Goodman 1980)

This educator strongly feels that it is inappropriate to give all children, a large sized pencil for writing at school, knowing that the child normally uses a small sized one at home. Also at about age two and a half a child begins using this regular sized pencil. He then comes to school at

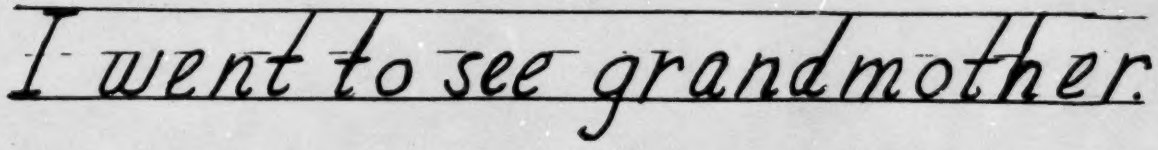
age five and is forced to use the "large primary pencil." But again, he goes home to use regular sized pencils. With this in mind it is not consistant to force on children these oversized writing tools. Educators, of course, know there may be exceptions. A child may need a larger pencil due to lack of normal muscular growth. But to say that all children, beginning to write, need such a tool, is erroneous. (Spaulding 1969; Wiles 1943)

A fifth error is that we find traditional circle-stick letters, presented to the learner, in unnecessarily large print. This can be anywhere from seven-eights of an inch, up to two inches in height. Taken from a reading standpoint, they eye span needed to cover a typical first grade word such as grandmother is unrealistic. Using one-inch size letters it takes about a six-inch span to write grandmother. Using the word in a sentence with a few other words easily results in the use of two or three lines of writing paper. This forces the eye to travel about twenty-five inches to read one sentence.

CIRCLE-STICK



D'NEALIAN



According to Spache, measuring usual book print of 10-point size, the eye sharply perceives only about four to six letters in the foveal area of vision. We see in our perception span another, though not sharply, twenty-

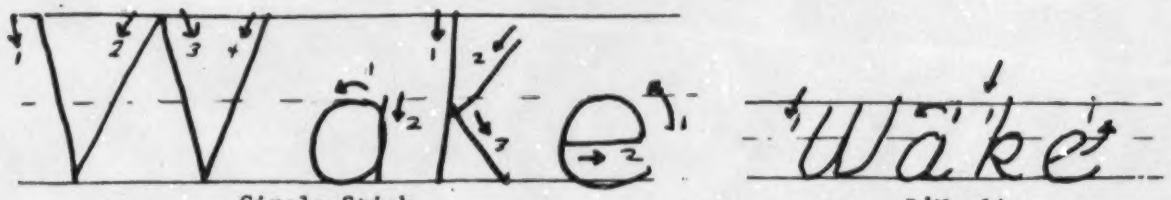
four to twenty-six letters. (Spache 1976) This would cover in lineal measurement a span of about two inches. Since the word grandmother, in large circle-stick printing, runs about six inches, it is logical to say that much of what children write, using the large letters, may not be read or perceived with clarity. This cannot do much for readability or comprehension, and in fact, may cause fixation or perseveration problems as the child focuses on one letter or word at a time.

The last error is the lack of individuality in circle-stick programs. Children are expected to make all perfect round circles, arrow straight lines, and make their letters vertical. This really is an impossible task as no two people can write exactly alike. There must be room for some individual differences. (Jordan 1972)

Knowing what was wrong with traditional methods of handwriting I developed a program to overcome its inadequacies. It has now been in use for over ten years in many Michigan Schools.

D'Nealian is a manuscript print that presents letter forms similar to standard print, has carryover skills to cursive writing and eliminates the previously mentioned errors of circle-stick writing. All letters are made with a continuous stroke except to dot the i and j and cross the f and t. This continuous stroke begins the developemnt of rhythm that is so necessary in order to write smoothly.

Because D'Nealian letters are made with a continuous stroke much less effort is involved in making letters. It takes 118 strokes to print the traditional ball-stick alphabet (both lower and upper-case) while only 58 strokes are needed for this new method. For example the words below illustrate how time and effort will be saved;



Circle Stick

Eleven strokes needed

D'Nealian

Four strokes needed

Children also begin to write on near standard sized paper. They start in first grade with a half-inch ruled paper with a quarter-inch midline. This is sold by most commercial companies as grade three manuscript writing paper.

Legible writing demands consistency in spacing, slanting and the size of letters.

Children may write their letters with a back, vertical or typical right-hand slant. However, once a slant is chosen it must be used consistently in order for legibility to develop.

Children use a pencil size that feels confortable to their grip. Some may prefer a large pencil, however, most feel quite at ease with the standard sized #2 pencil so common to all homes.

Letters in this program are presented in groups of similarly made construction and as a letter is introduced it is immediately used in a word. In this manner the child is learning the letter, along with its relationship to others in forming words. Basic vocabulary is thus enhanced, along with left-to-right eye movement and directionality. All of these are important ingredients for early reading. I want children to write words, phrases, and as more letters are learned, short sentences. In this manner penmanship becomes meaningful and is not just an exercise for all to write letters the same way. This method offers the learner a better chance to develop early

language art skills as they can quickly write words.

An important part in learning to read is to understand that print is oral talk written down. When children can easily write words they hear or say, instead of reading someonelse's words written down, they realize then the oral-written relationships of language. The road to reading may well be through a combination of language art skills rather then reading per-se! (Van Allen 1974 King 1976)

Teachers and children involved in this new way to learn writing save at least fifty percent of the time and effort usually expended. This is because there is no unlearning of one thing in order to progress to another skill. Children also show more interest in being able to write because right from the start their own writing looks more like "big peoples."

Once they have mastered the printing the child when reading can easily slide into cursive writing. The following chart illustrates this except for letters s and f.

up-hill stroke over-the-hill stroke

D'Nealian Manuscript	+ Added Stroke	= Cursive	D'Nealian Manuscript	+ Added Stroke	= Cursive			
a	↶	a	j	↶	j	s	—	—
b	↑	b	k	↑	k	t	↑	t
c	↶	c	l	↑	l	u	↑	u
d	↶	d	m	↶	m	v	↶	v
e	↑	e	n	↶	n	w	↑	w
f	—	—	o	↶	o	x	↶	x
g	↶	g	p	↑	p	y	↶	y
h	↑	h	q	↶	q	z	↶	z
i	↑	i	r	↑	r			

The instructional changes found in a continuous stroke print are positive. They represent a cleaning-up of what has been wrong with traditional penmanship. Because of this we find much less pressure on children in the learning process. Handwriting becomes a more pleasantly learned skill with less frustrations.

Children with dysgraphic tendencies are presented letters through a kinesthetic-tactile approach. This, along with auditory directions that accurately describe how to make each letter, makes the D'Nealian penmanship techniques a complete VKAT program. No ball-stick method can offer such learning impact.

Children usually start school highly motivated with teh expectation of learning to read and write. This desire has been built up for a long time. The sooner the child can begin to fulfill this expectation, the happier he will be, and the more meaningful reading and writing becomes.

Because children can write words easier and sooner with D'Nealian it is as important aid to reading development. This is because writing words develops left to right progression, establishes the early relationships of letters to words and shows that writing is an expression of ideas as its just oral talk written down.

Though not statistically proven, teachers recognize the high degree of correlation between reading and handwriting. This writer has found through years of teaching primary grade chidlren, the sooner a child can write legibly, the quicker he becomes a competent reader. Also, that by utilizing more fully what children can contribute to writing, the quicker they will write.

The key points are to get children writing with a continuous stroke print rather than component parts and to treat penmanship as a progressively developed individualized skill. Gone should be the necessity of tediously following prescribed penmanship patterns that in reality only a machine could duplicate.

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